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MCGUINTY GOVERNMENT IMPROVES ACCESS TO CATARACT SURGERY FOR NORTHWESTERN ONTARIO RESIDENTS

Funding Will Expand Cataract Surgery Capacity By 67 Per Cent At Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre

THUNDER BAY – The McGuinty government is increasing access to cataract surgeries for residents in the North West LHIN with a $702,000 investment for Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre to expand its cataract surgery program, Health and Long-Term Care Minister George Smitherman announced today.

"We are building on our success in reducing wait times for patients," said Smitherman. "This investment will allow cataract surgery patients to access the services they need closer to home. We are very proud of the great progress we have made working in partnership with our frontline health care providers to increase capacity for more surgeries."

The new funding will go towards training and educational initiatives for staff as well as additional surgical instruments and supplies to support an expanded cataract surgery program. It is expected to increase the hospital's ability to perform an estimated 1,900 additional cataract procedures per year. This represents an increase in capacity of more than 67 per cent. The investment, which is part of Ontario's Wait Time Strategy, will help the hospital and the North West LHIN make significant progress towards meeting the cataract surgery wait time target of 182 days.

"This funding will go a long way towards improving wait times for cataract surgeries in our area," said Ron Saddington, President and CEO of Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre. "We will be able to deliver cataract surgeries more efficiently by running two dedicated cataract operating rooms side-by-side with one ophthalmologist."

"This is great news for residents in Northern Ontario," said Michael Gravelle, MPP for Thunder Bay-Superior North. "People will be able to get the surgeries they need faster."

"Our government is reducing wait times," said Bill Mauro, MPP for Thunder Bay-Atikokan. "We are making the necessary investments to improve our health care system so it can be even more responsive to the needs of patients."

Other elements of Ontario's Wait Time Strategy include significantly increasing the number of medical procedures to reduce the backlog that has developed over the last decade, investments in new, more efficient technology such as MRI machines, standardizing best practices for both medical and administrative functions, and collecting and reporting accurate and up-to-date data on wait times to allow better decision making and increased accountability.

Today's initiative is part of the McGuinty government's plan for innovation in public health care,

building a system that delivers on three priorities – keeping Ontarians healthy, reducing wait times and providing better access to doctors and nurses.

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